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THE A(WAKE) ISSUE

THALIA

THALIA

Founders & Creative Direction
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Beatrice Hasell-McCosh in her studio,
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The a(wake) Issue

In this issue, we hope to capture a wide range of interpretations of the words embedded in the theme, and the relationships between them. The wake a boat leaves, touching an unknown shore; the ritual to honor the dead; the way a morning begins; the rising grip of water and consciousness.

Our contributors are motivated to create by travel and daily rituals; by tightly packed days and meditative quiet; by the desire to tell a story and to convey a feeling. We have hidden a trail of links across many of these seemingly disparate inspirations and impulses. We invite you to find them, and to create your own.

We hope that the wake Thalia creates is one of collective power—that the contributors celebrated in these pages, and our readers, absorb and reinforce each other.

C e l e b r a t i n g

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Molley May

Soojin Kang

Jill Kolongowski

Beatrice Hasell-McCosh

Angela Conant

Deborah Kay Kelly

Ashley-Rose Salomon

Caterina Lewis

Lydia Panas

Melissa Murray

Alayne Spafford

Meditation Facing into Rain

(in the California mountains)

Misty sunlight, and the creeks
full, land that was parched
and cracked four months ago

green as a dream

redwoods
duff and crumble underfoot
on this beloved trail

and the hairy lichens that look like Spanish moss
drowned witches' hair
tufts caught on the tips of live oaks

always I am at peace here
in this silence
and the sound of water

look at the twist and gnarl of live oaks
some of the branches spreading, twisting
all the way back to the ground

we begin how we begin

my son is becoming a father
the doors of his life swing open in the wind
and the whole frame trembles

a tiny tunnel opens sideways
through the grasses
it is a tunnel

for unborn children,
everywhere in this landscape
this wet tenderness

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Part of my teaching at the University of Mississippi is the gateway course for the Environmental Studies minor, Humanities and the Environment. We ended this semester with Thich Nhat Hanh's beautiful book, *The World We Have: A Buddhist Approach to Peace and Ecology*, in which he talks about impermanence—about how everything we take as stable ground, including ourselves, is in fact constantly changing, passing in and out of existence. We discussed how the awareness of impermanence helps us waken to the urgency of the environmental crisis, the rapidity of destruction taking place in the world we have trusted to endure.

This impermanence pierced me ten days ago, on the first sunny morning after days of rain, when all the Mississippi springtime flowers were blooming. I sat on the bottom step leading off the porch of our old house, looking out at the unmowed lawn practically at eye level, a tangle of grasses and wildflowers through which the molten sun shone, the colors preternaturally vibrant, and I thought, oh my God, it's like they say the world looks on acid, I can see the molecules on fire, dancing. After a while I came inside to work, and the first thing I saw on my laptop was Notre Dame, burning, the tower collapsing, flames completely engulfing the wooden structure, all that transformation into ash, and smoke billowing into the Paris sky. Like so many others, I wept. "Million-fuelèd, nature's bonfire burns on," Gerard Manley Hopkins writes, thinking of Heraclitus' "This world-order [kosmos] . . . ever was and is and will be: everliving fire."

So, as Thich Nhat Hanh says, all that remains of us is our karma, the fruits of our choices and actions.

Awake. Awaken. Woke.

What makes you feel awake?

Love. Love of my husband, children and grandchildren; my sister and her family; my students. Good books. Travel and coming home. Teaching. Love of the other-than-human world, and concern and rage at its destruction. Flowers, birds, the ocean, mountains, trees. And sunlight, night, and sleep.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

My husband and I both teach at the University of Mississippi. I wake up early because he teaches at 8 a.m. But I'm a morning groggy person, so I never teach before 11. I like to be very quiet—to lie in bed and listen to the birds in the little forest behind our house, read, take care of emails, eat cereal and fruit, drink coffee, putter around, eventually take a bath and wash my hair, get ready, walk or drive to school.

Nights, we have our rituals, too. We always eat dinner together and after dinner, we mostly read, though I like to sneak in a little Netflix. Eventually, we conk out—if I'm lucky, I put my book down first. We live in an old house, with high ceilings and ceiling fans, and unless it's very rainy or cold, we always sleep with open windows.

Does your inspiration stem from routine(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

Both, I'd say. Or sometimes, neither. I go through phases when I am writing a lot, and phases when I don't write at all. I do need to have more empty hours in my life, more hours to maunder around and see what happens—I am really good at over-committing myself.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

My work is a way of exploring what it's like to be alive, with my memories, thoughts, loves, griefs, concerns. Joseph Conrad writes, "My task is to make you hear, to make you feel, and, above all, to make you see." I like that, but I'd alter it somewhat, to add "myself" to the equation: I also write to enable myself to hear, to feel, to see.

I believe the Italian novelist Ignazio Silone once said that he wrote to "create a little company." I think that's beautiful—how our work can touch others, find others in their solitude, share what it is to be human.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

As a boat moves through the water, the wake spreads, lessens, eventually closes over behind it. The mountains rise in the distance, the lake is shining.

"We always sleep with open windows."

Wooden Comb

Death, the death of worlds, melting rivulets
of time, and I want to go into a far country,

get away from this knowing, rediscover
light on the water and the odor of thyme

sun-warmed and acrid on the hillside. To go,
with him, to find that stone hut

on a trail outside Campouriez, where we walked
one long ago midnight away from the village

to watch moonrise across the mountains—
that abandoned one-room hut where a woman,

I imagined, once combed her hair with a wooden comb.
My heart has grown numb. Today, buttercups blossom

in the muddy fields, along the parking strips
all over town, and my students calmly discuss

what forms of life will exist beyond apocalypse.
I cannot reconcile how the world is sweet,

how the world is burning. Next door,
in the trees, a little bird, chipping at the night.

SOMETIMES
MORE THAN I
CAN COUNT

Molley May

I've been interested in stories and people forever. When I was younger, it was adventure stories and epic tales but as I grew into my twenties, I realised that my real interest lies in the quiet everyday stories of the people around me. I'm massively interested in people and relationships and foster endless inspirations from them.

I think growing up quiet and bit odd makes you comfortable being the observer. I love to watch and listen to my surroundings and draw comics from what I absorb. I also use my own experiences to create comics and often use drawing to explore my own emotions.

"I've been interested in stories and people forever."

What makes you feel awake?

Things that make me feel awake include textures you can sink your hands into, the taste of pickles, walking home alone at night with my headphones on, and laughing.

How do you start or end your day. Do you have any rituals or routines?

I wake up at the same time each day to the radio. I let myself lay there for half an hour and just listen, check my phone, look out the window. It's a lovely moment of quiet and solitude that I relish. My evenings often finish in much the same way. I will write in my notebook and read as often as I can. I've always read in bed, so much so that I find it very hard to fall asleep any other way.

Does your inspiration stem from routine(s) or interruption to routine(s)?

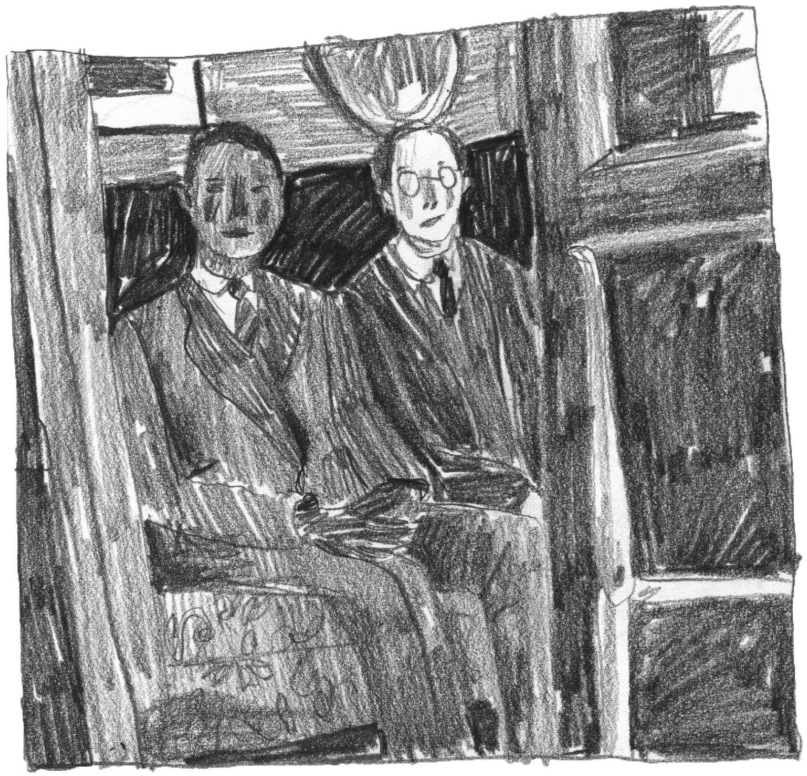
I don't deal with uncertainty well, so I enjoy a routine, nothing too strict, just the act of traveling to the studio is enough to set me up for working for the day. As for new ideas, I think both help in equal measure. I'm interested in drawing about emotions and relationships and find that inspiration can come from the routine conversations I have in the kitchen to the intense disruption of loss.

What feeling/experience do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I hope to create work that is relatable and honest. I want people to read my comics or look at my drawings and be able to sense the reality of it, but not in a trite or blatant way. I often use drawing as a way to work things out in my mind. I hope I can help other people work things out too.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I want to create something that feels real and true. I talk about honesty a lot when discussing my practice, and that's really all I'm after.



I'M
CUT UP,
CUT UP
CUT
UP
CUT UP

Soojin in her studio photographed by Markus Schroder

Soojin Kang

I was born in Korea and now work in London. I've been working on art practice full time since 2009 when I graduated Central Saint Martins college of Art and Design, London. My practice has been evolving from my early interests in fashion and textile design through a diverse range of media, including woven sculpture, installation and video. My objective is to infuse the sense and idea of emotional sustainability through craftsmanship.

What makes you feel awake?

When I find beautiful moments in ugliness.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

I enjoy starting the morning slowly to wake my brain, soul, mind and body. I have a very slow breakfast at home and go to the studio around 10 am. I check e-mails, social media and articles before I start to work. I mostly spend my evening with my 2-year-old son at home. When there is an exhibition schedule, I usually stay in the studio from the early morning to late night and focus on the fabrication.

Does your inspiration stem from routines or disruption to routine?

My inspirations come from all over the places and my routine allows me to fabricate them into an art.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

My work is instinctive and largely driven by my personal autobiography. Being a Korean living in London, I have no roots in any one place: I live a nomadic existence slipping between spaces. Travel has always been important to me and I veer between wanting the security of settling down and my need to be free. I suppose I derive a sense of continuity and consistency through my work, its repetitive motions and rhythm allow me to feel at home wherever I am.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I have no specific intention when making my work, but I do have a message to convey. My work explores the plane between perfection and imperfection, it is all about process. People tend to see the outcome of everything but process is often left by the wayside. I come from a background in fashion and textiles but chose to leave fashion as I discovered I had an aversion to the portability of fast trends. My interest lies more in consideration, dedication and the meditative process which requires some patience. Working with threads has enabled me to observe time and memory.

Left, *Untitled*

“Working with threads has enabled me to observe time and memory.”

Thalia a(wake) Issue

Left, *Fall*

Jill Kolongowski

I have two twin poles of interests—the catastrophic and the quotidian. I'm always interested in what happens when things go wrong, and the (sometimes impossible) task of righting those wrongs. At the same time, I love to write as small as I can. I'm very interested in the everyday details, the smallest moments, the almost-forgotten things that happen to us every day. There are stories hiding in every quotidian detail, and I'm interested in finding those stories.

Particularly in nonfiction, there's pressure for big, fantastical stories, but I think most of our lives happen on a smaller scale. I want to elevate those small, "uninspiring" days as something worthy of consideration and examination. My workspace reflects that—my desk is often stacked full of books and to-do lists, an intersection of my creative life and my real life, not terribly aesthetically pleasing, but lived-in, where the work gets done anyway.

I love writing nonfiction because I'm interested in the stories we tell ourselves about our own lives. What do we tell others about what happened to us? What do we end up telling ourselves? Who told us how we should be? Who do we, ultimately, end up being? How do we make ourselves?

What makes you feel awake?

A long hike, a perfect sentence, the morning after a snow, a third cup of coffee, my husband making me laugh, my students.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

On my best days, I get up, make coffee, and while the coffee brews, I sit on the floor next to one of my windows and meditate for ten minutes. After that, I like to read a few pages of poetry. My apartment is on the second floor, and in the summer, birds roost in the surrounding trees, and on those mornings I can hear them waking up. Many mornings, though, are not like this. Some days, I get distracted by my phone, or I have to get ready to go teach, and I do not notice the birds. At night, I leave my phone in the living room, take a hot shower, and after I get in bed, I read for half an hour, no matter how I tired I am.

Does your inspiration stem from routine(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

My inspiration isn't predictable. Every now and then, reading someone else's work or hearing someone brilliant read their work out loud will inspire me. But most of the time, it takes sitting down to work to feel inspired. Once I'm already writing, that's when I finally feel like I know where I am and, sometimes, where I'm going.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

Every story is different. But I like to write about unsayable feelings—things most of us are feeling and thinking, but things we're too afraid to say aloud. If just one person reads what I've written and feels seen because I've said something they can't, then I have done my job.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I tend to think of my work more in the present than in the future. I'm not terribly interested in having an impact after I'm gone. But my biggest dream for my work is that someone reads something I wrote and finds it lights up something small within themselves that they hadn't seen before. And if my teaching can help my students believe in the power of their own stories and their own voices, then I can't ask for more than that.

“I have two twin poles of interests—the catastrophic and the quotidian.”

The Cactus is a Very Independent Plant

We can't seem to stop buying plants. We're both 25, suddenly adults, and the plants feel like we're doing it right. Well, Charlie is the one who takes care of the plants and I do nothing but try to stay away. But the living green leaves and Charlie's daily waterings make me feel capable by proxy.

He grew up wearing his brother's hand-me-down jeans. His father poked extra holes in his little belts because the pants were five sizes too big. When the junk mail comes, he doesn't throw it away but instead reads all the circulars and cuts coupons for ground turkey and frozen waffles. He is not a worrier like I am but he still stockpiles nonperishable food like he's preparing for the worst. We've been together for eleven years and he still cooks my eggs over easy every Saturday morning. He gets upset when the yolk breaks. He's terrified of having children. If he were a plant he'd be a pine tree—steadfast in all kinds of weather and smelling great.

I grew up in a house in the woods so I usually prefer silence to people. I like to eat breakfast for dinner because I like beginnings better than endings. I keep a box full of all the cards I've received for the past 13 years. I think throwing them away would be like giving up. I feel bad for my least-used pens because they might feel neglected. Kids like me even though I'm never sure how to talk to them. Lately I can't talk about having kids without crying. Not because I want them badly. I am so unsure about children that it makes me feel like a terrible person. A good mother would definitely know. If I were a plant, well—I wouldn't be. I have a bad habit of killing plants.

One winter, while moving from Michigan to Boston, I left my aloe plant in the car overnight. In the morning I remembered it, brought the plant inside, and wrapped the stalks in warm towels. I stood guard and shooed away the cat. But the stalks had frozen, and it was never the same after that. Before, I used to cut off the plant's stalks and spread the aloe gel on my skin when I burned myself on the oven, then marveled at the way the stalks always grew back, like the arms of a starfish. The aloe plant was a cutting from my dead great-grandmother's plant. Even though the plant was done, I could not throw it away.

One day when my mother came to visit, while I was away at work, my mother threw the sagging aloe plant away and replaced it with a cactus. I felt betrayed, but my mother was better at knowing when to get rid of things. Soon I started to feel affection for the squat, ugly cactus anyway.

"The cactus is a very independent plant," my mother said, "Like you." Really she meant *It will be hard for you to kill a cactus.*

But sooner or later I will spill the cactus's dirt, and it will rot and start to turn black. Each day, a line of black will creep farther up the cactus's sides like it's drowning in itself. Soon the cactus will be completely black and start to lose its thickness, like a deflating balloon, like lungs slowing and stopping. I left it on the counter to punish myself. I worried that I was toxic. Cacti were supposed to be impossible to kill and yet somehow I'd managed it.

"I think this is dead," Charlie said to me, pointing at the blackened, shriveled cactus. I agreed to throw it away. He held the trash bag open while I tipped the pot inside. The cactus thumped to the bottom in a heap next to eggshells, coffee grounds, expired coupons. He put a hand on my back while I tied the bag shut.

Later Charlie decides he wants to try growing some fruits and vegetables because it will save us money and he thinks it will be fun. We go to the nursery at Home Depot and I watch while he holds two lettuce plants up to the light. I try not to let it bother me. What makes him think he can do better than I can? He has never even been a babysitter. I tell him not to buy any plants that are discounted.

While he compares chocolate mint and peppermint plants, I go to look at the succulents. I fall in love with the tiny desert gardens in pots no bigger than teacups. The neon-flowered cacti are the size of shot glasses; the aloe plant's stalks are shorter than my pinkie finger. He comes over to me, cradling boxes of strawberry plants.

"Why don't you pick out an herb?" he asks me. I feel a miniature heartbreak leaving the miniature gardens, but I know they're safer without me.

In the end we buy a cilantro plant, germinated soybeans, a cutting from a lemon tree, a cucumber vine, a strawberry plant, a pepper plant, and a houseplant with small teardrop-shaped leaves, for good measure. I am concerned about how we will fit a lemon tree in our living room. I'm concerned none of the plants will get enough sunlight. I am concerned that he's not worried about these things.

Charlie buys a trowel, gloves, fertilizer, and a special grow light for the soybeans. I remind him, gently, that we live in a one-bedroom apartment with no garden.

He says, "They will only grow as big as their pots." I wonder if this is true for people. At our apartment, he sets up the soybeans and their special light in the storage unit, like eggs in an incubator. He lines the other pots in a neat row on the porch.

The lemon tree, the cilantro plant, and the soybeans die almost immediately. I think it's a good thing we have plenty of cans of tuna and packages of Ritz crackers from buy-one-get-one-free sales. He shrugs and says, "That happens." But he leaves the soybeans' special light on, as if they might resurrect.

He reads articles on the internet, trowels, buys new fertilizer, trowels some more. I don't help at all, other than to lift the weak leaves with my finger and check for fruit. I am afraid, so instead I do the dishes, standing far away from the plants and letting water run down the drain.

Outside on the porch, the cucumber vine bears one strangely prickly, L-shaped cucumber. It will be ready when the prickles go away, so we wait to pick it. It's not big enough for a meal so I plan two tiny salads, three slices of cucumber on each. But the prickles never go away. The cucumber yellows and hangs dejected from its vine. Not even the squirrels will touch it.

Our favorite is the small bushy houseplant in a yellow pot. It had been sitting so long in Home Depot, buried by other plants, that its leaves were dusty. It dropped brown leaves at first, but we think this is just left over from the underwatering, the fluorescent lights. We think we are doing the plant a favor, reviving it with daily water. But still the brown leaves fall; there seem to be thousands of them.

One night I came home late after too much wine. I was trying to pretend I was not drunk, so I lay down to sleep on the couch. When I woke up to try and put myself to bed, I lost my balance and fell and my entire weight landed on the plant. I was so drunk I couldn't think of the word *branch* for the thing I broke. In my head I called it a bough instead.

Soon green leaves start to fall too. After a week away on a trip, the plant starts to look sickly. "It really doesn't look well," I say, like it's a dying relative. I try not to think it's my fault. Charlie sits on the floor next to the plant and begins to prune. Even more of the plant was dead than I expected. When he's done, the plant barely resembles a bush. It looks naked from the waist down. The remaining leaves are bright green but I do not feel hopeful. Charlie puts on fertilizer. I open the blinds at three o'clock, when the sun comes right in our apartment window. The leaves continue to fall.

I love to watch him water the plants. He goes out sleep-headed in the morning, wearing boxers. He knows the right amount of water for each plant. After the soybean seeds have been dead for weeks, he finally turns the special light off. The lemon tree has become only a dead twig with dried-up leaves, stuck upright in the dirt.

"I think this is dead," I tell him.

"But it has roots," he says. He tugs on the plant. "I can feel them." He does not throw the lemon tree away. Meanwhile, the strawberry plant blooms one green strawberry, but does not flower again. I wonder if this is what having children will be like.

"Someday we'll have a backyard for an avocado tree," he says. He is optimistic. I try to figure out how many more plants can die in a whole backyard. Too many. I worry.

Somehow, the pepper plant survives. Over and over again its tiny white flowers turn into long green peppers. Charlie discovers that they turn red if you wait long enough. He picks each one carefully, so as not to disturb the others. He trims any dead stems back. I don't really like peppers, but when he cooks tacos on Thursday nights and mixes pepper slices in with the meat, I tell him that it's perfect every time.

Beatrice Hasell-McCosh

Having spent a year at Leith School of Art, and then one at The Royal Drawing School, my practise is defined by drafting and figurative painting. Lately, I've been working on large-scale pieces, primarily from memory and closely observed figurative studies. I enjoy exploring and manipulating how the viewer might see my work; for example how one colour can be viewed and understood when set next to another.

I'm based in London, but I grew up in the Lake District, so I find I'm naturally attracted to muted and dark, tonally close colours. I am influenced by and admire Tom Hammick, The Boyle Family, Wes Anderson, Sickert, James Turrell, and T-Rex to name only a few.

Schwanengesang

“I want my work to be immersive”

Left, *Anyone Who Knows What Love Is (Will Understand)*

What makes you feel awake?

Working. I work best late at night, so however tired I feel I can always go to my studio and do 3 or 4 very productive hours from 10pm. It instantly makes me more awake.

The more I go away the more I love England but I do find that travels abroad focus my thinking in a way that being at home or in a studio can't. Once back in London, I focus on one or two of the drawings made while away, which will inspire my thought process and development for the next few months.

For the last few months, I've been making large-scale oil paintings based on drawings of koi carp that I did in Japan last year. It's such an exciting moment when work goes in a new direction.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

I am absolutely not a morning person, so I always try to arrange meetings and appointments in the morning. I begin painting mid-day.

The best part of being an artist in London is how sociable it is, so days usually end with friends. The art world is full of friendships and connections, and is intergenerational, which I particularly love.

Does your inspiration stem from routine or disruption of routine?

Definitely disruption.The more I do, the harder I work when I have time to paint. I thrive on moving quickly from job to job: organising events, writing, curating shows, and working part-time for a couple of artists.

What experience do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I'd really like to project a feeling of the space I inhabited. In trying to recreate it in my own language, I want to give the viewer a platform to experience the subject as I did, and as I remember.

Artists I admire like Cecily Brown, Tracy Emin and Cy Twombly use memory as an essential part of their practise, which I think allows for greater creative freedom and expression in mark making. I think this also means that the work takes on a life of its own slightly; and so when I'm working I never quite know what will happen and where it will lead.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I want my work to be immersive, forcing the viewer to take time to look, and to want to keep looking. It should be real life, awake and experienced, in direct contrast to the quick and easily forgotten flicker of imagery on social media.

Angela Conant

In my work, content traverses through stone, painting and video. In recent sculptural works, I carve marble slab into matrices for repetitive, public use. Viewers interact by making colored-pencil rubbings from the glassy surfaces carved with letters, body parts, facial features, or the numbers of a clock's face.

From smaller rock fragments, I carve hand-held sculptures whose forms are strange while evoking figuration. With these works, I make formal relationships between objects and the human body. Self-taught in stone carving, I work within my own vocabulary of form to sculpt each palm-sized, portable object. Art is an effective tool for intersubjective communication, as exemplified by viewers' shared experience as they interact with my work.

In my paintings, I borrow René Magritte's sense of depth, suspending objects in the extreme foregrounds of distant landscapes. This pictorial space, being a formal descendent of renaissance portraiture, places my paintings in a lineage of the gendered gaze versus the gazed-upon. I use my own sculptures as still-life objects, sculpting temporary clay pieces expressly to paint from. I make these spontaneously, responding to decisions in real time and resisting predictability while maintaining a formal relationship to the body.

In a series of video works, I remotely collaborate with my former classmate, Yasmeen Sudairy. Yasmeen (who is Saudi Arabian) and I (as a third generation American) make socio-political observations in our videos by straddling the reality of our societal roles as perceived from a western perspective. I interpret, edit and engage with Yasmeen, who improvises dialogue in Arabic, a language that has been conflated with a culture demonized by my western, American one. Placing that dynamic in various fictitious scenarios (a driving lesson, a newscast, a space voyage), I leave the viewer to their own assumptions.

Rolls (all photography by Stan Narten)

"I work in various media and this keeps me in a state of discomfort, uncertainty and wonder."

What makes you feel awake?

Working on something that requires real-time, impromptu decisions makes me feel most awake. This is when my favorite part of my mind is most active.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

I start by stretching before I get out of bed. My bed is situated against a wall, and I sleep on the wall side, so to get in and out I climb over my partner when I go to bed at night and when I get up in the morning.

Does your inspiration stem from routine(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

Yes, I work in various media and this keeps me in a state of discomfort, uncertainty and wonder. This state is the most generative to me, creatively.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I do not aim to facilitate an experience or feeling through my work. I make work based on something that comes from my own experience, and the viewer will have their own reaction which I cannot control.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

If the word wake in this context refers to something like the wake of a boat in water, meaning what I leave behind and how my presence affects things around me as I pass through places or people's worlds, then I would say that I hope to be a constructive and supportive presence; to give the sense we have built something together, and that we are stronger having met.

Get back on

Deborah Kay Kelly

“A brushstroke of black ink on mulberry paper.”

I write poetry as a practice. I write it to learn more about what has attracted my attention or turned up unexpectedly. It is a practice in sharing the discoveries, which is a kind of love. For several years, I deliberately grounded the work in images and observations from the natural world, while I usually avoided both large concepts and confessionals. I’ve since begun to work with these, so actual humans appear more often. Still, I find most seeds for my poems in visual images, and in whatever arouses my sense of recognition, together with mystery or humor or both. When I travel alone, especially, my notebooks are full of such beginnings. And lately I’ve found others’ words are lively starters, ones I really notice, as they grow thoughts all their own.

What makes you feel awake?

Fresh awe. How language changes my mind all at once—Buber, in six words, makes a radical way of thinking about life; Solnit strips the packaging off Patriarchy in a sentence. How Kaminsky's poems make my heart larger than I am. How Rodin's sculptures are emotion, originating and peregrinating through a body. Color. Especially O'Keefe's colors. A brush-stroke of black ink on mulberry paper. A field at night, and I'm sitting with invisible bugs and a world of scents. Mountains, covered with so many beings, yet fully spacious. Touch that feels me feeling touch. The virtuosic complexity of Paco's guitar. The elegance of Nakai's flute. The wet- polished agate of a neonate's eyes, it wakes me up to looking. To run a wilderness dance over rocks and roots. Piñon pine, smoke or sap. To sit, still.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

I have no rituals right now, but routinely open the blinds, pour the coffee, and go out to the garden in my pajamas to see what my plants have done during the night. Then, I read and write, which I usually do again after sunset.

Does your inspiration stem from routines(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

Routines support practice and I find unexpected thoughts while in them, but travel is my favorite inspiration.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I hope readers will enjoy the music in my poems, that they'll find companionship sometimes, and some kind of surprise.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

One that trails experiences, however small, and feeds any kind of creativity in the readers.

Doubt

Sun's core is a cold violet

and you unspool into shallow
tremors of air.

Yesterday you ran
to where fire'd sprung from water

of a long blue dawn,

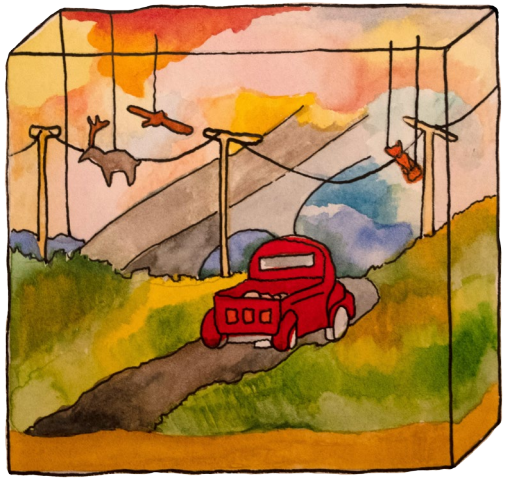
to where a drum is a well,
is the ear of ground.

A tin pail clangs
to be dunked in silence.

And you just spill.

Now you know
it all falls and rises.

You know what you don't,
and pour it—into your remaining years.



Hours

for Virgina Woolf

She distinguishes animal from object at a distance.
Deer are not peeled tires
or tailpipes on the blacktop.
She always stops. Lifts. Drives a pickup.

She'll smooth tail of fox with her hands.
Clean mouth of snake. Finger eyes of squirrel shut.
Bundle-up skunk flattened to lane lines.
Struck-still bodies.

On close observation six years ago,
while burying a finch in her garden:
she saw how quickly
the body'd gone smaller.

Since then,
though earth is hard and her shovel's not sharp,
she's given burials.
In her world, silence the anonymous
passage of tires through the noise of hours.

Patella

Young plums,
moon-licked and green,

grass-stained knobs
of knees

in a copse that breeds

all wild things
between plats of potatoes.

Summer starts with children
in leaves,

on lower branches.

When moth silks burst on the milkweed.

Brother on the Bridge

after *Striven*, by Jeffrey Pethybridge,
whose brother jumped from the Golden Gate

Your glasses are useless
toward the Pacific,

salted, inside, by your wrung-out ducts,
and by gusts of spray.

The bridge is cold to hold onto,

where your brother didn't transit
but transected, at mid-point,

with the traffic behind him,
and the lane-dashes, like slaps.

He couldn't bear the span.

And rain always pangs
the hunger of the bay.

Face struck with water
so thirsty, it stings,

you hear the traffic sounds
he heard,

and the waves,
the bitchy gulls,

the moaning of cables
in wind.

Hum with them,
a zither for a brother's hymn.

An interview with

Ashley-Rose Salomon

By: Julia Haney

I meet Ashley-Rose in the Mattapan Branch of the Boston Public Library, where she was teaching a workshop with GrubStreet, open to the public, entitled "We-telling, re-writing, and re-owning our narrative". Ashley-Rose is an educator, spoken word artist, and activist. She is also a woman who was once asked to dress up as the mermaid queen at an event at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. During our time together, she weaves her story deliberately, syncing seemingly separate experiences into intricate patterns.

Prior to our conversation, I participate in her workshop, a class of all women (though not by design). We sit in a circle facing each other. We are each asked to write down one value that we bring to the circle, a value we need to be respected and uplifted. Ashley-Rose brings grace to the circle. "Grace is undeserved forgiveness, newness, opening," she says. "And in a lot of ways black women right now, we've got to learn to move with grace even after being harmed, which is so difficult. It's something I'm working on, receiving it and giving it."

We each agree to honor each other's values and Ashley-Rose tell us, "We are the keepers of stories, so the stories should stay here and the lessons go with you."

When the workshop concludes, an old student of Ashley-Rose's joins us; he is now in the 8th grade. The three of us move from the library's conference room into the light-speckled, leafy courtyard and she says, "Perez always shows up at random parts in my life—like here is my life on a Saturday, being interviewed by Thalia Magazine.

JH: Talk to me a little bit about spoken word, and the relationship between spoken word and slam poetry for you personally, before we talk about how you harness spoken word to empower others.

AR: I love words that are spoken. I've learned to appreciate words on a page because I understand that people want to take them with them. I look at poetry as someone speaking and it evokes some type of emotion. Initially I didn't categorize myself as a poet. I competed in oratory competitions in college, and it wasn't because I wanted to be a writer, but because they were giving out $1,000 and I thought, "I can buy so much marijuana with that!". Then I ended up winning. The speech was about George Bush's No Child Left Behind Act, about how it wasn't true. I think people were shocked that a black girl, a freshman, a girl on a financial aid scholarship, and from the projects, won the competition.

And so, I started writing poems. My junior year many of my friends murdered each other out in Archdale, and that set me up for a lot of depression. I was taking a class at the time called "Hip Hop and the African Diaspora". I told my teacher, that I was going through too much to write the final paper, but that I could write a spoken word piece instead. She loved it and encouraged me to go into spoken word. I realized that there was something special there, speaking poems, with people coming up to me after and telling me they felt healed. I started working in drug rehab right after that, teaching poetry.

I worked with some of the white boys in Southie who were meth addicts. They couldn't stand up at an open mic because their spines were in too much pain from the meth, but that's not who they were at their core.

We'd get into poetry prompts about alienation and I started seeing: this is where the healing is happening. So, I told Northeastern, I don't want any more co-opts in the hospital, I really like this poetry science thing. If you give me a chance I'll explain it by my senior capstone. And that year, I won my senior capstone to create a project that was geared toward mostly girls, using science, the arts, and incentives to re-think how we encourage kids to go to school and learn.

I don't like slam poetry and I am not a slammer. Why are we looking for approval about our narratives? When I was first introduced to slam poetry, I went to watch people perform, and just pour out their hearts, give true accounts of their experiences, and then the judges would be like, "that poem's a two". But the best prophesies in life are oftentimes not accepted at first (Anita Hill's testimony was not accepted at first; only 28 years later). How many poets are you booing of the stage—ones that are telling the truth? Spoken word has always been a spiritual thing for me, but in slam, if my purpose is to be pitted against someone else, I have no interest in it. And I think I'll be successful without it.

JH: You see poetry and spoken word not just as forms artistic expression, but as tools to lift others up—how do you go about doing that?

I have a science background, so my classes always marry science and art. One of my methods is to make sure artists and writers face each other—and that writing workshops are more about talking and listening than writing. Everett Hoagland told me, read more than you write. That's my first method, always. I read more than I write.

I also make sure my classes are relevant and of the time, that they connect the then and now. I work at several schools now through Suffolk University and I have a class of six "bad kids" in the ninth-grade—they really are the best though. I love them. It's a physics class, so I did a class on physics and light frequency in Nipsey Hussle. While we were looking at light frequency, we were also thinking about how the students could change their own paths. These kids are considered the "bad kids", but is there something they can input now to change their wavelengths? Waves are contagious, so what you do in the ninth-grade impacts tenth-grade. Having them look at their own environment as an ecological system is something I always do. Everything is an atom—that's how I teach poetry: taking big complex ideas brought all the way down to atoms and stanzas. That's my method.

Last year, God put on my heart the idea that my classes needed to be a lot about water and volcanoes. The students didn't know that their curriculum was spiritually built *(gestures to Perez)*. So, we were learning about volcanoes and water intensively. They studied water as a molecule, water as life. And even though it was a science class, they were simultaneously learning the Langston Hughes poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"—I made them connect that.

In your generation *(gestures to Perez)*, I'm always saying: you're going to have to hold back the water. You're going to have to wade in the water. We are in Boston, and I tell them we are going under water. Once you start changing the climate, you change the ocean's direction and temperature, you change the weather. Not overnight, but it will change their careers, who has water, the fight for clean water.

In 1996, I was one of the 250 families that lost their house in a man-made flood in Boston. I told my students about that—told them how I have blotches over my skin because of it. It wasn't like it rained and we got flooded. We got flooded with sewage. Roslindale is built like a bowl and Delford Street, was on a decline with a wall. So, when the sewer exploded, it went up to the height of this building. Within hours, our homes went underwater. Because it was sewage, people got sick and died; it was probably one of the biggest cover-ups of all time. It is a story about the wrath of water and the wrath of forgiveness. It's a story about how eventually, it was the Puerto Ricans in the projects who looked out for me. It wasn't the government. It was beneficial in some ways, because it showed me love. I was in 7th grade at the time, and we were homeless, so I wrote an essay that got my mother a house from Habitat for Humanity—it's just around the corner. In that moment, I knew my words meant something.

JH: Can you explain one the challenges of working in and teaching this medium?

How do I make it last if I'm not there? That is probably the biggest difficulty of teaching in this method. I don't want my students to think this is an embodiment of me.

What makes you feel awake?

Purpose. Without purpose, you're still sleeping.

What type of wake do you hope to create?

Restoration. I don't believe everyone has a linear path. I know I didn't. I don't think anyone in the projects in Archdale would have told you I'd be the one here right now sitting for this interview.

There were people who saw buds in me when I was nowhere near planted. To me, a wake is a thing that becomes contagious, like a wave, even though not everybody is going to see the person who sent out the first ripple. I've had a lot death recently, but I'm also thinking about the waves of blessings coming to me now; it's an awakening. Almost like a baptism.

It makes sense in the end. Roses don't blossom early in the season, they need to have direct sunlight. I used to write poems right in front of the projects and sell them for 25 cents. I wouldn't think in 20 years I'd be in a predominately Haitian neighborhood, at this beautiful library, and that most of the people in here would be Haitian. You and I having this conversation is a spiritual moment and to have it happen in a courtyard with one of my favorite kids? These little things synchronize and then we can be restored by telling our stories.

Caterina Lewis

For me, the act of painting and drawing are like thinking, I'm working things out through a decidedly non-verbal language. A kind of calligraphic line exists in most of my work. When I make drawings, I often feel like I am rehearsing the movements for marks, which then reminds me of practicing handwriting or calligraphy as a child.

I am interested in the abstraction of human experience and capturing an essence of a perceived situation, so my work exists in the fluid space between abstraction and figuration; and my paintings often deal with the transformation of one into the other. Sometimes, through making a work, a metamorphosis takes place and the work becomes something unforeseen and unknowable. I think about these images as somewhat 'given', I could never have conceived of them beforehand, yet they are familiar. A receptiveness to the unconscious mind has become more important in recent years, I have to trust myself and yield to the processes I engage with. I am most satisfied with works that I can look at and think 'I know you, you always existed I just brought you into the light'.

What makes you feel awake?

Honesty makes me feel awake, when I encounter it I feel the act of courage behind it. Also, great art, literature, poetry, theatre and ideas but basically for the same reason, that they are somehow honest.

How do you start or end your day?

I start my day with lists. I have endless to-do lists because they help me focus on what I want to achieve that day. Also coffee. I end my day with reading literature, it's a nice passage to sleep.

Do you have any rituals or routines?

I make my paint (egg tempera) and I suppose the process is a bit of a ritual, it creates a lead-in and thinking space for me before I get into making anything. I also use an airbrush that needs meticulous cleaning and that process creates space to reflect on what I'm doing.

Does your inspiration stem from routines or interruption to routines?

Both! I set out with a routine that I imagine will lead me to where I want to be but invariably it doesn't, so I nearly always disrupt it. When making paintings I have a process which could be considered a routine but it's not until the process runs dry that things start to get interesting in the work.

What feeling/experience do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I had a tutor in my first year of art school that discussed aesthetics as being the opposite to anesthetics and I have always enjoyed this idea. The thought that we can experience lucidity when looking at art is exciting, that perhaps something latent can be brought into the fore of the mind. I hope to create paintings that transport people, that loosen their tethers and allow them to drift off to unnameable spaces. Paintings that provoke/evoke a feeling about what it is to be alive in a particular moment.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I hope to create a wake of the inner self.

“Honesty makes me feel a w a k e ”

Lydia Panas

WIDE AWAKE

There is great capacity in telling our stories, expanding the conversation, and creating a space for empathy and empowerment.

My work is about women; who we are and what we want to become. There is little space in this world to explain how we feel, a combination of ambivalence, vulnerability and strength. Our collective bias against women creates double standards and unattainable demands. We won't move forward if we don't understand the inequality in its origins. As we've seen with the development of the #metoo movement, dozens of women may come forward with the same allegation and yet they will still be labeled as liars, too sensitive, too emotional, too malicious or promiscuous. The issue is compounded when women are bombarded with contradictory messages: be strong, be sexy, be beautiful, be powerful, in every aspect of their lives. Sleeping Beauty explores these themes. The women and girls in this series lie outdoors on the ground in a vulnerable position, yet they are alert and aware. This work highlights the capacity for strength and knowledge that lies below the surface.

Working with women specifically has inspired a deepening in the potential of my images – more subconscious, more multi-faceted, more intense, probing deeper into our mutual strengths and vulnerabilities. We have learned to conceal our feelings when internal leanings clash with societal expectations. I want to describe what it feels like to be a woman, to be human, by experiencing fully the range of emotions we have the capacity to feel. Paying attention to what I bring to the photographic encounter, I explore the roles of power and trust on both sides of the camera. My portraits reverse the traditional command of the viewer. In these works, the subject takes control of the encounter. They watch us. Looking into their faces, we reflect upon our own condition and it's as if we become the one who is seen.

These pictures are about what we know, what we understand, how we fit into the world. These women are aware of who they are. They are not deferential or passive, overly polite or afraid to make the viewer uncomfortable. Wearing their strength quietly, they are ready to move on.

“My work is about women; who we are and what we want to b e c o m e .”

What makes you feel awake?

Such a great question. I guess the most concise answer would be – I feel most awake when I am making creative connections (which most often include human ones). When I am feeling free and confident enough to connect a variety of, sometimes disparate, thoughts together while simultaneously learning something new about myself and the world.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

I like to start my day by making a perfect latte (always hoping its sunny because I love the way the sun streams in through the windows), listening to the news on NPR, and checking my email. I take comfort in these rituals, they make me feel safe and grounded before I begin the day.

Does inspiration stem from routine(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

Another interesting question. I guess it comes from routine. I like to proceed in a certain manner every morning. The stability frees up my imagination. My mind craves a sense of clarity to feel comfortable moving forward.

Interestingly, I just returned from a month-long residency in Rome where I was worried about finding inspiration outside of my routine. But it happened anyway. Slowly at first, and then suddenly, I knew what I needed to do. So, occasionally, disruption is a good thing for me.

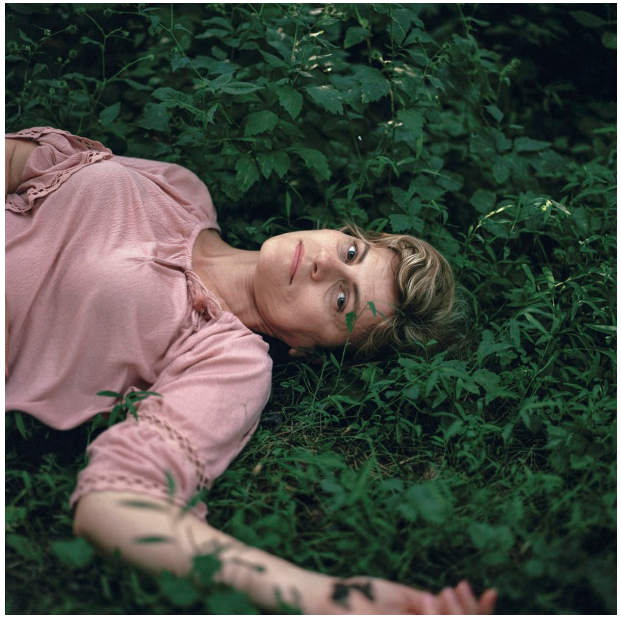
What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

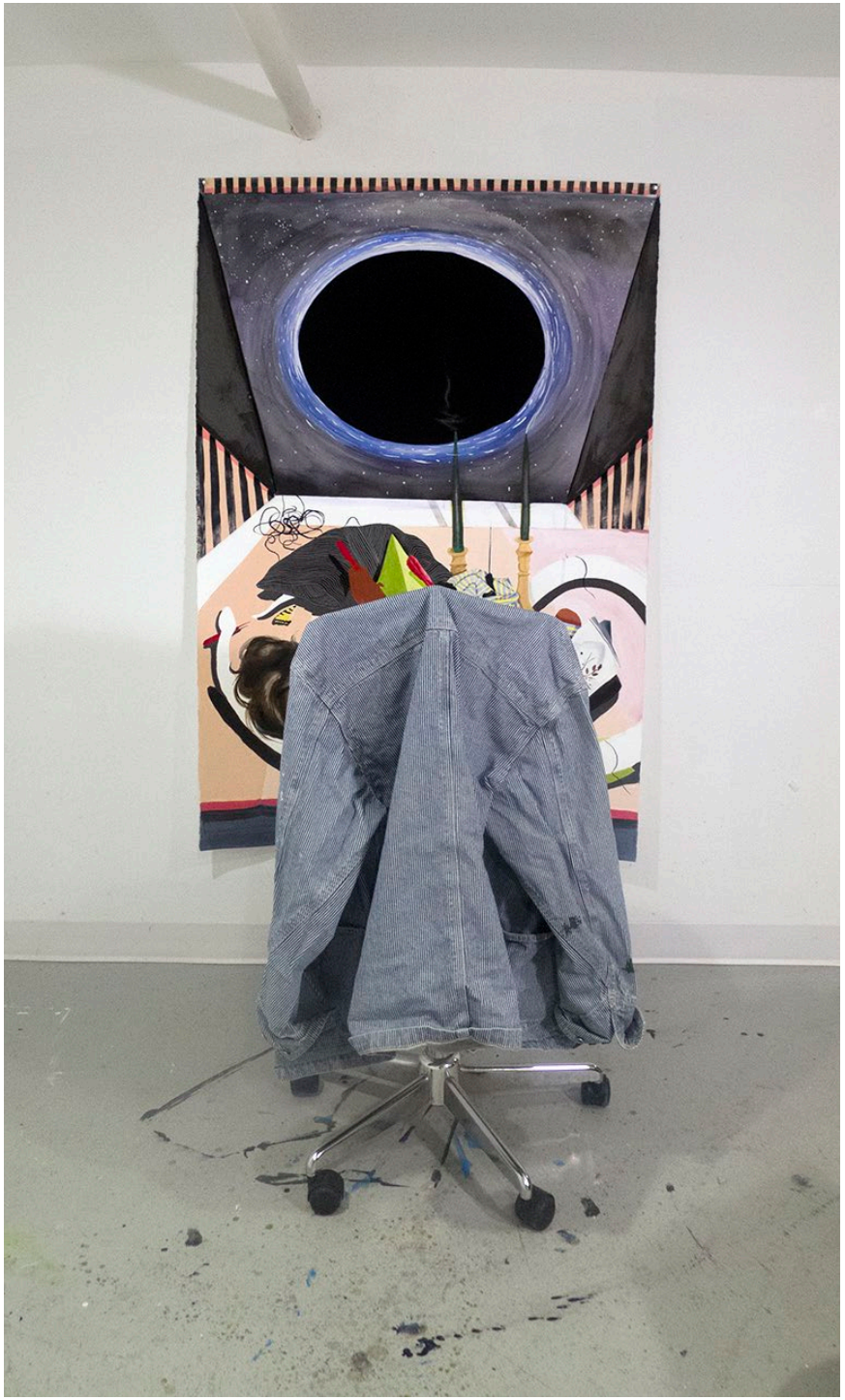
I’m trying to create a space for empathy through my work. The process of photography for me is about establishing a trust between my subject and myself while providing a space where we can see our real selves in each other. As I wait with the camera, the sitter will ultimately transcend their own identity, absorbing my complex feelings about longing and intimacy and reflect them back to the viewer. My portraits are interpretations of early hopes, uncertainties, reservations, and a means of processing my emotions. I investigate what I knew but needed to keep hidden as a child. In thinking about our own memories, most of them include an ambivalence between love, anger, disappointment and joy. These complicated feelings sit side by side in my photographs, just as they do in life. I am interested in the difficult questions. I want my images to reflect not how we want to feel, but what we really feel.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

When we know and understand what we are really feeling, we can move forward. Our world is in desperate need of a forward move.

Clockwise from bottom left, *Amrin; Ava; Bailey; Carmen*





Melissa Murray

In my new series, Mother Tongue, I am exploring the unspoken emotions associated with Motherhood. Pulling imagery from personal domestic spaces I am creating a multidimensional metaphor reflecting on the moments one has when mothering another human being.

This series is a space in which I explore feelings of loss, weight, clumsiness and a joy that only can come from selflessness. Each painting in the series represents a consecutive moment in a timeline from conception to present day. They are about making new spaces where there is no room, facing death while creating life, losing yourself through transformation, they are about fear and the unknown.

Mother Tongue is the journey of giving yourself entirely to another person.

“Mother Tongue is the journey of giving yourself entirely to another person.”

I want more for you

Left, *small pinch*

What makes you feel awake?

That moment when the mental image fills, tips the cup from the subconscious, and pours into conscious thought. The things you have seen, your memories, a conversation, a pattern all meld and begin to make sense. A new painting becomes clear and makes me feel ignited, alive and awake.

How do you start or end your day? Do you have any rituals or routines?

It is a special morning when I can have the space to begin my day with a ritual of my choosing. When I'm in the country and my life is as it should be (with my husband and son, and absolutely no agenda), I set out for an early morning walk with the Delaware river by my side, and sneak down a flyfisher's path just to watch the water with my dog. I awake most mornings here in the city with an unrelenting urgency and panic, readying myself for feeding, walking, dressing, carting and shopping for my near and dear ones.

I end everyday in the studio, a subterranean space below my apartment that is quiet and separate from the chaos. I regroup there: working on a painting, writing about a past painting, or just finding order and solace in organizing.

Does your inspiration stem from routine(s) or disruption to routine(s)?

Both I suppose. Since having a child, most of my time is no longer my own. That was once my biggest fear about motherhood, but now I am beyond proud to have the responsibility of raising our future, so I find a balance. I set my mind to work in the midst of the hectic times throughout the day, making a plan for the studio. And when the time of day becomes my own, I work unencumbered by the listless feeling of just getting started. Efficiency has become a fuel of its own and it is essential.

What experience/feeling do you aim to facilitate through your work?

My recent work is about my experience as a mother, but I enjoy representing a vagueness in subject matter. I feel there is a special, identifiable spark in connecting through an honesty that speaks to a person's own personal narrative. I want to remember with people: a collective chamber of memories, same but different, a familiar smell, deja vu, that fleeting sweet spot of sharing an honest moment with a stranger.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I hope to ride the wake of open eyes, the wake of a new society that remembers for the purpose of either cherishing or fixing. I hope to add to the wake of internal reflection, honesty, and accountability. I hope to create for myself a graceful acceptance of fear and trauma, love and maternal instincts. My work is a representative of these hopes and truths.

Alayne Spafford

When I was younger, I had a variety of vastly different jobs, from working on a fish farm near Alaska to working as a beach cocktail waitress in the Cayman Islands. During that time, I was always creating and drawing but it wasn't until I moved back to Saskatchewan that I started studying art in earnest. I received a BFA from the University of Saskatchewan in printmaking and drawing and then studied art, textiles and weaving at Concordia University as well as the Centre des Métiers d'Art en Construction Textile in Montreal. From there, I spent half a decade with the Cirque du Soleil where I worked in the costume department: hand-painting and dyeing costumes, as well as lacemaking. Since moving to Montreal I have been focused on painting full-time.

I like to work in different mediums and in series. My large canvases begin with collage. The collage elements are often historical, personal, or ephemera. For example, I often use a century-old newspaper found in the wall of my house, vintage wall paper, old crochet work done by my mother, items collected on trips, or remnants of costumes from Cirque du Soleil. The first layer of the painting is generally collage and a quick wash of random colors, with subsequent layers built up in oil, exposing and covering base elements until a balance of color and form emerges organically.

I also work in sketch books, which began as a place to collect sketches of ideas, images of art, and other things that inspire me. By removing the images that had been pasted into the books, I discovered remnants of the original glue and marks. The fragments themselves were quite beautiful and achieved effects that could not have been obtained in any other way. These fragments became a starting point for new studies. Working with acrylic, oil, spray paint and pencil and over 20 books, a process evolved. Drawing, painting and collaging. Building layers. Returning to them days later when the paint dried, or years later when time provided a new perspective or inspiration. The books have transformed from a source of inspiration into unique works of their own.

"The books have transformed from a source of inspiration into unique works of their own."

Thalia a(wake) Issue

Left to right, *sketchbook 14; sketchbook 1*

What makes you feel awake?

So much. Color is a big one. I find I respond to color in such a heightened way. Certain colors, combinations, or intensities can make me stop in my tracks and just stare. I almost get an adrenaline rush of happiness. Making things makes me feel awake, but whether it's painting, knitting, collecting, decorating, or gardening, it is all about color for me. Everything I do creatively is about different ways to learn about and experiment with color.

How do you start or end your day. Are there any rituals or routines?

I paint every weekday but first thing in the morning I always get some sort of exercise. I always feel so much better afterwards and ready to take on the day. After a quick email check, I make a big cup of coffee and head to the studio. I generally paint all day, until 4 or 5. My routine is pretty strict because I work at home and it's easy to be distracted.

Does your inspiration stem from routines or interruption to routines?

My inspiration comes from both. I collect things as a regular routine—twigs or rocks, beach combing, looking for ephemera. That said, interruption to routine is inspiring as well. Challenging the way I've always made art by using new brushes or materials can help me see things differently.

What feeling/experience do you aim to facilitate through your work?

I hope people see the energy I put into my work. It's more of a feeling I'm trying to invoke rather than telling a story. I purposely pair down my imagery to be as non-referential as possible. I think there is a commonality and accessibility in that.

What kind of wake do you hope to create?

I hope to create a visual language that people relate to without necessarily knowing why, something that they feel rather than know.

THALIA submissions

Thalia is a community and magazine dedicated to fostering collaboration and celebrating creatives who identify with womanhood.

t h a l i a m a g a z i n e . c o m

c o n t a c t @ t h a l i a m a g a z i n e . c o m